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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANAMA 000315

SIPDIS

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HUMRIT
SUBJECT: BAHRAIN: UN DEMOCRACY FUND PROJECT UPDATE

REF: STATE 19781

Classified By: DCM Susan L. Ziadeh for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (SBU) In a meeting with UNDP Program Analyst Mohamed Al Sharif March 28, Poloff inquired about the status of a UN Democracy Fund (UNDEF) project being conducted by the UNDP in cooperation with the Bahrain Institute for Political Development (BIPD). Al Sharif explained that the project has undergone much revision from what was initially proposed due to delays in project approval. Initially a significant part of the project's activities were devoted to election-related capacity building to be conducted during the fall before the November 2006 parliamentary and municipal elections. Although the initial concept proposal was approved and a detailed proposal submitted in November, there was not time to hold pre-election activities.

¶2. (SBU) The overall title of the UNDP/BIPD project is "Supporting Democratic Governance through Democratic and Political Education and Strengthening the Capacity of Newly Elected Members of Parliament." The intended outcomes are an increased culture of democracy with a knowledge of governance and democratic values and development of an improved and effective parliament exhibiting skills of deliberation and oversight. The project will draw on the experience of the Oslo Governance Center in planning and conducting activities.

Project Focus

¶3. (SBU) The project has three areas of focus. The first is democratic education programs. The project proposes to hold a series of events for the general public and for political societies on political participation. Topics include constitutional rights and freedoms, political systems, the importance of political participation, respect for human rights, the role of civil society to protect human rights and democracy, and the role of education and the media in a democracy. The target is to hold ten educational activities for the public, NGOs, and political societies.

¶4. (SBU) The second area is building skills related to legislative and oversight responsibilities for both members of parliament and municipal councilors. Foremost is an orientation activity about how to initiate and draft legislation that is based on sound information and research. Also included are activities on budgeting, mainstreaming gender issues, international conventions, and partnership with civil society. The project's target is to conduct five training activities for MPs and five for municipal councilors. In addition, the project will organize exchange visits to Asia and Europe to create networks and share experiences.

15. (SBU) The final area of focus is on both the development of political leaders and their skills, and general political empowerment of citizens through a national dialogue on unity and social harmony. The project's targets in this area are to conduct five workshops on political skills development, to organize three activities to empower women in politics, to present five high-profile seminars on national unity, and to commission five research papers on indicators of national unity and social harmony.

Timeline Unspecified

16. (SBU) According to Al Sharif, UNDP is coordinating the proposal closely with the UNDEF, which gave the UNDP indications the proposal would be approved officially in coming weeks. Al Sharif said that approval will set in motion steps to bring together a steering committee composed of the BIPD Chair, BIPD Executive Director, and the UNDP Resident Representative. The project manager, to be chosen, will also be an ex-officio member of the steering committee. The steering committee will approve a proposed workplan and review progress frequently. The project will also form a consultative committee made up of stakeholders (up to 25 members) who are not implementing partners, but may be participants in some project activities.

Perception of Project

17. (C) The project implementers have a very close relationship with the government. The BIPD is a

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quasi-governmental organization that receives its budget from the government and whose activities are reviewed by a board of trustees that is appointed by the king. Therefore perception and support of the project by the government is positive. On the other hand, there has been skepticism about BIPD's early activities from political societies and civil society groups alike. These activities were seen to be of little practical benefit to them. Many oppositionists view the establishment of the BIPD as another step toward monitoring and controlling the activities of political societies and NGOs and chipping away at their independence and freedom.

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